

## Ep #188: How to Land a Book Deal with Shira Gill



### Full Episode Transcript

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**Tobi Fairley**

[The Design You Podcast](#) with Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to the *Design You* podcast with Tobi Fairley, episode number 188.

Welcome to the *Design You* podcast. A show where interior designers and creatives learn to say no to busy and say yes to more health, wealth and joy, here's your host, Tobi Fairley.

Hey friends. I have a treat for you today. Especially those of you who fancy yourself a writer, who have maybe dreamed of writing a book, a design book or another creative book.

I have today for you Shira Gill. And you may have heard Shira on the podcast before. She is an extraordinary not only life coach but really mainly an organizer and really a consultant about both how we think about your homes and spaces and organizing and minimalization. And she is here not only because she has a brand new book coming out which I have gotten my hands on at this point and it is exquisite and beautiful and the perfect how-to if you want to become a minimalist.

Even if you don't there is so much there to really help you think about your space and your things in an intentional way. The thing we were talking about in today's episode is what it's like to write a book. And that book journey. And so, if you've wondered, if you've been afraid to ask, if you didn't know where to start or what the process was like, you are absolutely going to love this episode. So here is my interview with Shira Gill.

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**Tobi:** Hey Shira, welcome to the *Design You* podcast, or should I say welcome back to the *Design You* podcast. I was just telling you, I think you're the only guest, I might be wrong but you're at least one of the only guests that has ever appeared twice on this podcast since we've been taping or recording over the last almost four years, so welcome.

**Shira:** Wow. Well, thank you. How fun is that? I love it and I'm super happy to be here.

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**Tobi:** I know, so fun. There's some guests that are so good that I'm like, "We'll for sure have you back." I remember specific people I plan to have back but for whatever reason just always new people and new ideas coming in. Yeah, so this is super fun. So remind everybody a little bit about who you are and what you do. But today we're not going to talk as much about your craft, we're going to talk about a different journey you've been on which I know people will really be excited to learn about and hear about. So let's start with who are you, tell us the things.

**Shira:** Who am I, okay. So I am a stuff and life editor. I like to say I'm a hybrid of a home organizer, a stylist and a life coach. And basically what I do is I help people clear physical and mental clutter and really focus on helping people to simplify every aspect of their lives. So I did one-on-one work with clients for years and years. And now I have online programs. And my new book, *Minimalista* contains my entire process and toolkit to help people edit, and organize, and style their homes.

**Tobi:** Amazing. So we definitely want people to go get the book when it comes out. And it should be any day by the time this airs. I think we're airing the week of your publish date. And they can also go listen to the first time you were on *The Design You Podcast*, because we got into a lot of that, the whole concept of minimalism and how you structure your business, and who you work with, and what you do. And so if they're like, "Give me that stuff", for sure they need to go hear the other episode.

But today what we're going to talk about is your journey of getting published, not only you're creating a book, writing a book but the other ways that you've been published, gotten press, really kind of shown up in that editorial space. And you're going to take us on that journey, right?

**Shira:** Yes, I would love to. So if we kind of start at the beginning. When I was a little girl, I loved magazines. I pored through them. I imagined one day maybe being in them. I especially loved home and design magazines. I even loved the William Sonoma catalog and the J.Crew catalog. So I think I just gravitated towards beauty, and design, and it was always something that was just kind of part of who I was. And so my career evolved over

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many, many years. But once I started organizing, I think I just thought it would just be fun to pitch some ideas.

And so that is really where I started. I never had a PR repping me. I just started with nurturing relationships as I know you do very well, and reaching out to people, making connections. And really thinking about with each publication that I pitched to, who was their audience? What is their focus? What type of content do I see here that I love? What gaps do I see? And so I really thought of an editor as my client. So I think the mistake that I see people making a lot is it's almost like they're asking editors for a favor like, "Hey, can you feature me?"

And editors are busy, and overloaded, and get pitched to constantly. So I think I kind of thought early on, well, I want to make their life easier. And I think that could be a good way in, instead of asking them for a favor. So the way I started was literally I just picked a few publications that I thought would be a good fit for what I do.

And I reached out to the lifestyle or home editor of the publications specifically. And just really quick and succinct pitch, "Hey, I'm Shira, I have this business focusing on home organizing and minimalism. Here are a few quick ideas I think would be really fun for your audience. Here are some pictures of my work, happy to hop on a call and see what might make sense for you. I have lots more where this came from but don't want to bombard you."

And I just literally would give three to five headlines or ideas. I always like to think about clickbait, what are the subjects that you would be curious about or think I'm dying to learn more. And so that's really what I did. It was so simple and impactful. I started booking one thing, and then another, and then another and kind of found that once you get your foot in the door with press and establish yourself as someone who can write, does have a unique point of view. It's then easy to leverage that to get more press.

**Tobi:** Yes, I love it. Gosh, there's so many things I'm thinking of. There's so many things I love about what you said including – I mean although I'm

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sure you knew this was a way to, in essence, build your career, you weren't describing those things as, well, I knew I had reached a certain level of my business and it was time that I should be getting published. Or I knew that getting published would get me the clients that I want. And I think those are some of the mistakes people make too.

You were essentially, the way it sounds to me, saying, I have this value and I want to get it out into the world. And they're an amazing vehicle for that. And they need me, and I need them, how do we match this up? And that's so much more in service, not only to the editor like you said, but to the end user of the magazine. And I think a lot of times when I see people trying to get published, or even writing a book, although yeah, they may have a point of view, or they may at least develop one in those moments.

The motivation is not the same as what you're describing. It's more about validation. It's more about, I mean I hate to just say ego, but in a sense it's more about validation, credibility. And those things happen, they come along with it but it's not your reason it doesn't sound like for taking those steps.

**Shira:** Right. I mean and I have to be really careful because of course ego can be involved and once you get some press, I did at times find myself thinking, well, what's the next bigger thing. And I had to really slow myself down and examine, well, Shira, why do you want that? What are you hoping to accomplish with that? What is your reason? Do you like your why? And at a certain point I realized it really would be best to only pursue press for me if I felt like it was fun. I wanted to collaborate.

I wanted to add value but not just to add another badge of honor to my website and kind of keep seeking those external points of validation.

**Tobi:** Exactly. I think that's so interesting and true because I think that is part of the treadmill we can get on. And any time we're – I've even done recently a podcast on external validation. And any time that's our motive it's this insatiable desire, almost like a drug and you need more, and more, and more, and more. And I think in that case a lot of times even the quality of

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what we're putting out in the world and the service we're doing is diminished or it's just the same, or it's kind of boring. It's not really at the root, like you said, of the why you're doing this which is so good.

**Shira:** Yes. And the other thing I realized, I mean I kind of confessed this to you earlier when we were talking offline, but I landed a huge feature in Real Simple which was the holy grail as a professional organizer. And it came out and I really did think the world was going to shake and my business was going to change and literally nothing happened other than a few random people calling me and saying, "Oh, so fun, I saw you in Real Simple." But nothing really changed in my business, the phone didn't start ringing off the hook.

So I also want to drive that point home to people who I think look at maybe the resumé of Real Simple, and New York Times, and House Beautiful and oh my gosh. But really, I'm the same person with the same business who just happens to have a bunch of logos on my website because I've contributed to a lot of publications.

**Tobi:** I love that so much. I love sitting in that thought, we're both life coaches. So I love sitting in that thought of I'm the exact same person with or without the logo, the exact same. My why was the same hopefully then as it is now, or maybe even if it's shifted it's not because of that press. Because I had the same experience. And I admittedly, I did get on the treadmill of wanting all those things. If you're really truly a successful designer you'll check all these boxes.

And same thing, I mean I had covers of House Beautiful and Traditional Home. And I didn't suddenly have a clientele of the elite of the elite. And I wasn't being jetted across the country and suddenly about to have a Netflix TV show just because I had added these accolades or these pieces of press. And not that it doesn't – I mean at some level it influences some people especially if it makes people think that they must be legit or maybe that client's ego says I need someone who's been validated. But at the end of the day it really doesn't change that much, right?

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**Shira:** It really doesn't. I think to your point, I think it establishes credibility, it's kind of a shorthand for people. But then at a certain point once you've been in a number of large publications, now when I get in more publications really nothing shifts because I've already established that I have press. And so it feels funny. I almost wish I was more excited. I kind of want to get back to that little girl feeling of my dreams are coming true. But you do get a little numb once you've kind of hit that goal. It can't keep you buzzing for that long. There's got to be other stuff that drives you.

**Tobi:** That's so interesting. Okay, so is the other stuff writing a book? And let's shift to that conversation because when did you decide you wanted to write a book? Why did you decide you wanted to write a book? And start taking us through that experience.

**Shira:** Yeah. So, I guess I have been organizing homes for nearly 12 years. And for the majority of my career I was just working one-on-one with clients. And realized at a certain point, I can't help as many people as I want and there are many people who don't have the luxury of hiring an organizer but certainly need the help.

And so initially I kind of scaled my business by starting some online programs. But I still felt I had so much, I had so many tools and so many things I had learned. And the idea of containing them all in a book that was \$25 that anybody could buy and know every single thing that I've learned and apply it without spending thousands of dollars to hire me or fly me around the world. That was my driver, was just I want to help the people. I want to make it really easy and accessible.

**Tobi:** I love that so much. So did you write a book that in essence is more like a how to or a handbook as opposed to a lot of times in design, people write these sort of just – I don't know if they're called, monoliths or just a body of work and their design philosophy? And yeah, there's always some tips in there but to me it's kind of the extension of just the really high end lovely website that had all their beautiful images on it.

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And again I'm not being disparaging but I just, I think one is more like this is my autobiography, look at my amazing work which is truly amazing most of the time for those people. And then there is a different kind of book that's like let me break this down for you, let me make this where you can have this skill, or this benefit, or this sort of experience, or this value in your space and in your life.

**Shira:** Yeah. So my book 100% falls into the latter category. I really wanted it to be a DIY step-by-step guide, even for someone who felt like they never could get organized. They didn't have the gene. They were so overloaded. I wanted it to be a toolkit and a process that was so easy and approachable and fun. So I've read all the organizing books and I think there are so many good ones on the market. But I noticed most of them don't have images.

It's such an esthetic field so I wanted my book to be beautiful enough to be a coffee table book but then chockfull of tips, totally helpful, user friendly and fun. So the feedback that I heard from my clients again and again were things like, "This is so overwhelming, but you make it fun." Or "You found a way to break it down so that it feels doable." And so for that reason I really broke the book into these little sections and broke down each room into mini projects.

So even the busy working mom who feels like they never have any time can tackle a project in 15 minutes and feel like she's making progress.

**Tobi:** That's awesome, I love it, okay, so amazing. Talk to us about what this was like. I mean I know that there was – that's a huge thing in and of itself. There is the writing of the book, there's the deciding to write the book, there's the deciding what the book should be, there's deciding if anybody's interested in the book, there's the publisher piece, and the editor piece, and all the stuff.

So I don't know where you want to start but let's dig into that process because there are people listening who are like, "Yeah, I do dream of a book, not just for validation but because I really want to serve someone, or

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I have a message or a purpose behind this.” And so let’s break it down for how they can make this happen.

**Shira:** Absolutely, yeah. So I had always dreamed of having a book, but I was not actively pursuing writing a book at the time this all kind of unfolded for me. So what happened was I just was publishing articles. I published one in particular for Goop about the link between home organizing and self-care that did quite well. And so I started getting some interest from agents and publishers. And they all had the same questions.

So for your listeners who may be interested in getting a literary agent or a book deal there were three specific questions that I realized I had to answer in order to get a book deal or even just an agent. And those were, what is your unique message? Why is it important or timely right now? And why are you the one to deliver it? And they seem so simple but man, I spent a lot of time figuring out how I could answer those questions and really the process.

So I did get a literary agent based on a phone conversation where I essentially described why my process and toolkit were different from other organizers and how this book could be unique. And in terms of establishing why I was the one to write it, I had a decade of experience under my belt. So I had helped hundreds of people in person and thousands of people online. So I had this perspective of I know what the universal pain points are. I know what the big challenges are. And I figured out how to solve them for people in an easy and fun way.

So that is how I got my literary agent. Then a part two which was really excruciating, was she essentially said, “Well, now we need to have a framework that is going to be very appealing to editors so we can sell this.” And we started off – I really thought what was an interesting angle was organizing for busy moms. And my book ended up being a great toolkit for busy moms, but she decided at a certain point, no, we really want this to be for everybody. We don’t want to just niche into parents.

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So there were a lot of pivots and just discussions about who do we focus on? What's the niche? What's the framework? What's the structure of this book? And that literally took nine months. So it took me more time to figure out the structure of the book than to write the entire book.

**Tobi:** So interesting, yeah, that's fascinating. And I love so much of what you're talking about here because I coach designers and creatives. And I feel like I'm constantly trying to convince people the value of really deciding the answers to those questions just in general about your business before you even write the book, not even just as a book project.

Because I think everything that stands between what where businesses are and where they want to go, how do I get better clients, how do I get more press, how do I make more money is exactly what you just described. That whole niching concept and kind of building a framework around what you do and who you serve. And people are so afraid to do that I think. And want to believe it's really hard and it's not easy. But it's not the hardest thing in the world that you'll ever do. It's doable. You can create that. It's kind of about making a lot of decisions.

It's like there's an answer out there and you have to find the right answer and unearth it. It's like deciding what you're going to be and what you're going to stand for. And I find so many people so afraid to stand for something. But when I look at the people that are having success in the areas they want to have success in just like you, you absolutely stand for something. You're all about not only your style but your belief system, around minimalism.

I mean I find it so funny, people can't see us right now, but you are literally in all white with white headphones and an all-white background. And I have on a black shirt, black headphones, and my entire background could not have more color. It's like a rainbow. And it's so funny because it's like polar opposites. We're almost like Snow Miser and Heat Miser, can you remember that from our childhood? But it's so clear what your point of view is, and I think you had the courage to just decide to be clear.

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And even when a lot of times I would call, which people hate this word, polarizing in essence, because you're repelling everybody that's not aligned with your message, right?

**Shira:** Yes, it is scary, and I think where many years in my business where I kind of teetered around the minimalism and it was like, well, this is who I am. And it's how I live but I don't want to impose it on anyone else. I don't want to alienate anybody. And truly it was when I just decided to go all in on here is why minimalism has been an incredible tool in my life. Here's how it can help you, fully embracing it. That is really when my business exploded and when I got interest from publishers because it set me apart from a million other home organizers who were not focusing on minimalism.

**Tobi:** Right, yes, so good. Okay, I love that. Okay, so talk to us about a little bit more, I know before we started we were chatting, and you were saying there was some specific moments in the process that really involved getting feedback from my agent. And getting feedback from the editor. And interest from the top publishers. Have we covered all of that? I mean was that just really the niching down or is there a secret to really understanding that process of talking with those people and getting the book deal, signing the deal?

**Shira:** Yeah. I mean I think it was really for me having a really good literary agent who I trusted, who could guide me in this process because I had never written a book before. So she was the one and really the process was so arduous. This nine months of development before she pitched the book to anybody. It was just back and forth, sending proposals back and forth with red pen edits and then pivoting and then starting over. I really wanted to throw it out the window at a certain point. And then I realized in doing this process I was actually figuring out my business and bringing my business to a whole other level.

**Tobi:** That's what I was thinking when you were describing it, I'm like, because this is that work. This is that work I was saying people are afraid to do. So going through this process made you commit to all these decisions about who you were and what your business is, how it serves people.

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That's exactly what I was thinking. I was like it's sort of like a baptized by fire version of actually finally doing all the things that we probably should have already – maybe not should have but we could have already been refining, and defining, and quantifying, and clarifying about our business that would have made the whole kind of experience of being a business owner a whole heck of a lot easier.

**Shira:** Yeah. And I have to say, I didn't realize I had a specific process. I always worked in a very intuitive way. And it was not until somebody said, "What is your process? How are you going to lay it out and simplify it for a reader of a book", that I actually realized, I do have a five step process. It's really clear and now I can teach it. And I can – I had been practicing this kind of clarify, edit, organize, elevate, maintain process for my entire career but without having names, without having a clear description of what I did.

So that was the most valuable thing, even though it was long, and frustrating, and exhausting, that by the end of that process when I had a really tight proposal and a synopsis of who I am, what I do, the value my business brings and how I'm going to teach it to others. I was like, now, I feel like I can do anything in my business. I just have this level of clarity.

**Tobi:** Yeah. I'm sure it elevated and maybe you haven't even had time to go there yet but it either did or will elevate any courses you have, any articles you write, your website, all the things. You now have this framework for your own business, not just the book that you can use, and iterate, and repeat all over the place, right?

**Shira:** Yeah, 100%. So basically once we had that then my agent pitched it to editors, we had interest from Penguin Random House who I signed with and HarperCollins, so it was unbelievable because truthfully I was like, "I just want any book deal." And then it was the big guns came out to play. And so I had some meetings, kind of went with my gut, the editors I met from Ten Speed Press which is an imprint of Penguin Random House. They just got my vision, my editor who I ended up working with lived literally five minutes from my house which never happens.

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And so I signed and then the process of writing a book is really different from what I imagined it to be. And if you're working with a publisher especially, the process is so much longer than I ever could have imagined. And as a kind of fast paced get it done person, that was a big adjustment for me of just even if I write the entire book in six months, that book's not going to come out for two years.

So even as we're recording this, I have been done with my book for quite some time, but it had to go through editor after editor, and art director, and copy editor, and marketing and sales team to really get it 100% ready to go out into the world.

**Tobi:** So is the whole process two years or is it actually three years almost because of the nine months you spent getting ready to pitch? It's really almost a three year process, yeah, so interesting.

**Shira:** Yes. Which it won't be as quite as long for my second book but yeah, really I mean my experience, of course every publisher is a little different. But from the moment that you're ready to sign the deal to the day that the book comes out seems to be around a two year timeframe.

**Tobi:** Yes, I've heard the same thing. Can I ask a few questions about several things that have come up? So first of all about the agent. So when you described getting your agent it was almost like you had – I imagine it like a sports agent. You have to be good enough in essence, your message has to be good enough to kind of have them say yes to you. But you're still hiring them, right or no?

**Shira:** Yeah, I mean it's a mutual relationship.

**Tobi:** But you have to pay for that, you have to pay for their services or no, they just represent you?

**Shira:** The way that it works is that they take a percentage once you sell the book.

**Tobi:** Yes, got you.

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**Shira:** So, in my case that's 15%. And so essentially, they're actually working you for free. It's similar to a real estate agent where they kind of take a leap of faith on I believe in this person, I want to try to sell their concept knowing that once I do, it will pay off. But really, I mean she spent nine months working for free helping me develop this concept. And then it was only once we sold it that both of us got paid.

**Tobi:** Okay, interesting. And then what's the process of finding agents? Did you ask other people you knew that wrote books? Do you just Google literary agents? Is it listed in the back of your favorite books that you're like let me check these people out? How do you go about that process?

**Shira:** Yeah. Well, so for me I had a number of friends who were published authors. And so once I started getting interested, I basically reached out and said, "Hey, do you know anyone I can talk to?" And I wasn't even doing it at the point when I really was ready or had a proposal. I was just thinking, let me get some information. So I think I was quite lucky in that I had a conversation that resulted in signing with an agent. I don't think that's typical.

But I would say normally it would be starting with your network, who do you know? Do you know anybody who's connected to a literary agent you can speak with? Because even if they don't happen to be the right fit, they will know someone who is the right fit for your concept. And then also what you suggested, really looking at similar publications and looking in the back acknowledgement section who's the agent that was thanked and Sherlock Holmes-ing it and then reaching out to them and saying, "I love these projects that you worked on. I have something I'd love to pitch, can we take a meeting?"

**Tobi:** Yeah, amazing, okay. And then as far as the type of book, so you're writing something, or you wrote something that could be a coffee table book because it's got beautiful images. It's not just pages of copy and content. Is that a specific kind of agent that just works in kind of that home world where they also have photography? Or do agents do different types of books? Could an agent that represented your book also represent

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someone who just writes a New York Times bestseller on – I don't know – some other topic, self-help, business leadership, anything like that?

**Shira:** Yeah. So I think they all have kind of broad categories that they specialize in. There's so many agents that focus on fiction versus non-fiction and then within that, for example, when I asked my friend, "Hey, do you have anyone I can talk to?" She said, "Well, my agent only deals with fiction but within her department there's someone who does lifestyle and interiors?" So that's who I got connected to.

**Tobi:** Yeah. So you have to know what kind of book you want to write. Because I spoke with you earlier too when we were offline and I was like, "I actually have a publishing company that's like, "Yes, we would love, please give us a pitch."" And we've talked for a year, and I was just like, "Yeah, yeah, I'm busy, I promise I'm going to." But there was just some part of me that was like, I don't even know that I want to write a design or interiors book. I feel like my book is more like business, or leadership, or whatever.

And so I don't know that I might not do both but yeah, that's so fascinating. I mean so you could still potentially start with the same company or the same sort of group. But you've kind of got to know what sort of book it is that you're wanting to create.

**Shira:** I think you really do. I had the specifics of this is a home organizing book and I do want it to be visual. But that was specific enough to match me with the right agent who really specialized in that and knew that industry.

**Tobi:** So good. And then the last question I think I probably know the answer to, but do you think, because you were saying, "Any publisher, I just want my book published but then I got these, the big guns." Do you think it's because the process your agent took you through was so rigorous that your proposal was so appealing that it really hit the quality level of people kind of at the top of the publishing game too? Because it seems to me that would be the case.

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And that if you maybe didn't put as much thought, and intention, and work, and kind of rigor into that process, I wonder, we would never know but I wonder if that would have had a different outcome, what's your kind of gut instinct about that?

**Shira:** Yeah. So I think it's a combination of factors. I think if you are not a celebrity, which I am not, you've got to have an incredibly strong proposal and/or a platform. And so when I was pitching, I think I had 35,000 Instagram followers, which at the time I was very proud of. I had worked so hard to get to that point. And I was sort of stunned when my agent said, "Well, it's not even worth mentioning because to a publisher they really only care if you have 100,000 or more."

And so her tactic with me was let's leverage all of your press, and articles, and publications which will establish you as an expert and pair it with a real home run of a proposal. The one thing I want to add about the proposal that I do think really made it an irresistible offer is that I had it designed. So I hired a graphic designer because I wanted it to look like a visual beautiful book. I didn't want them to have to just conjure up. And I even had them do a table of contents. I had them put in an about me and a bio.

And so the people who read it, I think they were going to love it or hate it, but they were going to get such a crystal clear sense of what this book could be.

**Tobi:** So good. And such an opportunity for you as a creative, as an artist, as someone who is into beauty and visuals, of course to present it in that authentic way. And sometimes those are the things that we forget to leverage or assume everybody does or has that is definitely not the case.

**Shira:** No. And I have to say I feel so lucky because I think because my brand vision for this book was so specific that now the book that you will see and read is very similar to the proposal that I sent over. They really took it and ran with it and said, "Yeah, we got your voice, your colors, the vibe and we're going to take this and run with it." So it was really helpful.

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**Tobi:** I love it, yeah, it's so good. Okay, now let's get into the process, the process of writing the book because that's a whole, okay, all the way up we've been what, nine, or ten months, or a year, or your lifetime to this point? And then you get the deal and then they're like, "Okay, let's go." And then that starts a whole other kind of phase of this process, right?

**Shira:** Yeah. And what's funny is I have to say because everything that preceded writing the book was so hard and complicated. For me, writing the book was the easy part because I had the voice, the clarity, the framework, the process, everything figured out. So it was almost like, now I just need to sit down and fill in the blanks here.

**Tobi:** So good, yeah.

**Shira:** I've done the hard work. And so basically, I got my book deal right before the global pandemic. And so whereas I had had this fantasy of sitting and luxuriating in cafes with my laptop. I was actually hiding in bed from my children with my laptop.

**Tobi:** No, I can't help you with your math, go away.

**Shira:** Right, yeah. It was really challenging. And I think I kind of quickly realized because they were thrust into this new situation of distance learning from home, a husband who had always been out of the house all day was suddenly home with all of his stuff. Everyone was everywhere and it was chaos, and I had this book to write.

**Tobi:** About making your home not chaotic.

**Shira:** Yeah. So essentially the way I did it is I guess I followed my own advice about taking a big overwhelming task and breaking it down into small bite sized chunks. And so I kind of broke down my chapters and I saw, well, if I can complete one chapter a week every week in six months I will have a book. And that felt really manageable to me. And so the way that I did it is my kids and husband started work and school respectively at around nine in the morning.

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And so I just said to everyone, “From 7:00 to 9:00am I am not yours. Nobody can talk to me. Nobody can look at me.” And I would wake-up and literally drink a glass of water, grab my laptop and just write for two hours a day. And then I could help my kids with their homework, and deal with the dog, and making lunch and all of the things. But in that way of batching my time and just being very consistent with every day two hours first thing in the morning I did at the end of six months have a pretty solid draft that I could submit.

**Tobi:** And can we talk a little bit about just what the writing kind of almost looks like? Because I love to write and I shared with you earlier that I wrote a blog for gosh, 10 or 11 years and loved it. Some people it’s miserable, I really enjoy writing. I write scripts for my solo podcasts when I do them instead of interviews, I craft things. So is it like that? Is it similar to just literally sitting down and kind of writing the story version? And of course there are times when you break things out into steps or whatever.

But is it truly just okay, what would I want to say, I have these kind of main bullet points, let me just start kind of stream of consciousness writing about this topic or is there a different way, the mechanics of the writing at least for you kind of came together?

**Shira:** Yeah. So for me with this kind of book because it was a toolkit book for somebody who was overwhelmed, what really helped me is just thinking for every chapter of the book what are the results that I want somebody to have and what are the takeaways that I want them to have after reading this section?

So if it was, say I was writing my chapter about the kitchen, which the kitchen is so intricate and there’s so many different things to organize, I just thought how can I make this really simple for my reader so that I’m just going to have one little section on the fridge, one little section on the pantry? And that really helped me to organize my thoughts and just thinking what are all of the things that could be overwhelming to the reader? How do I simplify them and distill them in a way that is going to feel really manageable when someone reads it?

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**Tobi:** And did you have a guide already of I can have x number of paragraphs in a chapter or pages in a chapter? Or do you just write and see what comes of it and then start to edit it down and then start to fit it into the size the book needs to be?

**Shira:** Yeah, that's a really good question because I mean I was told when I signed my contract my book had to be between 60,000 and 80,000 words. That meant literally nothing to me. I was like I don't know what that means or how to approach that.

**Tobi:** But your 12 chapters divided by 80,000 words.

**Shira:** Yeah. I don't know. And I am a creative so really I think I got lucky because my process was okay, I have an entire career to download from my brain. Let me just get it all out and then I'll worry about word count. And luckily I think I ended up right around 75,000 words in the end. And maybe this is terrible advice, I just couldn't think about it. I had to just focus on what do I want to say? How can I say it in the best way? And then I'll look at word count and figure it out if it's a problem. And I did have editing help.

So my husband, I'm lucky enough, he has an MFA in writing and he's a really talented writer and knows me and my business better than anyone. So essentially my process, he did not love this, but he was a saint is I would finish my messy, rough draft chapter, one a week. I would hand it to him and then I would go on to the next chapter and he would do an edit. And so it was always moving forward. I wasn't then ending up with 20 chapters that nobody had looked at. So it was sort of this passing the baton and I also had a great friend who had different writing skills.

And once my husband had made sure there were no really sloppy errors then I felt like I could give it to my friend. And she would give it another look, and she was also a mom, and a working mom so she would kind of look at it from that lens. So I would say to someone, make sure you have two to three people that you trust who can kind of be your eyes and ears and look at things with a critical eye once you've kind of gotten your messy first draft out of your brain.

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So by the time I sent it to my actual editor I had two really talented people that had already looked at it. And so she was like, “This is incredible. You’re already pretty much there.”

**Tobi:** So good. So if you don’t happen to have those people in your life, you could potentially hire someone that helps you, which I love. I’m always for hiring professionals. And I’m just like, “What does this add to the cost or the time or whatever?” And break the math down. But I love that. I happen to have a friend that is a really great editor too that I would use in that way. But I would pay her for sure to do that just because that’s kind of one of her skillsets that she would do for sale. So yeah, I love that advice.

And just because your husband doesn’t have an MFA or your wife doesn’t have an MFA and whatever, you can find people. You just add that into the process and the way you’re thinking about it and potentially the cost of doing.

**Shira:** Yeah. There’s so many great copy editors you can pay to edit for you. And I would say depending on what you’re writing about, having somebody you trust just to give you, just to weigh in just on content and is it easy to understand? Does it flow well? Does it make sense?

**Tobi:** A potential audience, someone who would be reading it potentially as if they would purchase the book?

**Shira:** Exactly. Exactly.

**Tobi:** Yeah, that’s really good.

**Shira:** That’s why in addition to my husband I was like, “Well, I want a busy working mom to read this through that lens and make sure it all adds up.”

**Tobi:** Right. So what about the days that you had writers’ block, what about the days that you didn’t want to write? Because I mean if you’re writing every day for six months, I mean even – is it Steven Pressfield or I think that writes maybe in *The War of Art* about how just the discipline of being a writer, you have to get up even on the days you don’t want to write and

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write anyway. Of course being a life coach probably helped you a ton with that because you're like, "These are just thoughts, they're creating really yucky feelings. My action is I don't want to write, I'm procrastinating."

You could be onto yourself but not everybody comes from that skillset. Would you recommend, are there tips? Do people just also need their life coach with them on the journey of writing? I would say yes for sure. Talk to us about that part.

**Shira:** Yeah. I mean I think for me I didn't have a lot of resistance because in a weird way the pandemic, the pressure of that and the constraint of that made it so that I didn't have all day to procrastinate. I knew these two hours in the morning are so precious. And if I blow it, I'm going to be behind. So I guess I was motivated a lot by just the idea of how good completion would feel and kind of thinking of that future self me that's like, I'm so glad you did this even though you didn't feel like doing it.

But there were certainly days where I just wasn't feeling it and would just have to say, "Okay, I'm going to do my best today but if this is not great, I just have to pick up the laptop and fix it tomorrow." And I would also know because I had this one week deadline with myself of a chapter a week that if I felt writers' block and did nothing I was going to have twice as much the next day. And so that really just helped me.

But I think also finding a chunk of time where you can rid yourself of all distractions, even if it is just an hour a day or even a couple of hours a week, that was the thing that helped me the most of kind of claiming that and telling my family, "Nobody is allowed to disturb me during this window of time no matter what, it's off limits." So that really helped.

**Tobi:** That's amazing. So you shared with me earlier that you just really love writing and I do too. And you also said you've had plenty of friends who are writing books that are totally miserable in the process. And maybe ultimately once they get through it, they still are proud of it. But maybe they don't want to do another one. You're already working on your second book.

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So can you talk to us a little bit about how to know if writing is for us, if there's a book in us?

Just because we're on the success path of our industry doesn't mean we have to check the box, it says now it's time for you to write a book. Talk to us about that a little bit.

**Shira:** I mean honestly, because the process is so long and so grueling, and typically not lucrative by the way. You're not in this for the money, writing a book. I would say my metric is like is it going to be fun? Of course it's not going to be fun all the time. But if it really just feels excruciating you should absolutely not write a book. Find a different vehicle for your creativity. And I will say most of the people that I know who are organizers or designers who are writing books have told me that they are miserable, that they do not enjoy it. They don't love writing. It feels excruciating.

And so I really wonder, well, then why are you doing it? What is the kind of compelling reason for doing this? And I think there's so many different outlets like having a podcast, or doing a TV show, or starting a YouTube channel. That if writing just isn't your thing, and I think most people know if writing is pleasurable for them or not.

**Tobi:** Just being on Instagram or TikTok for goodness sake. There's a million ways to get your message out, or to show up, or have your creative expression, right?

**Shira:** Totally. And I think for me, I grew up writing as a kid. Both of my parents were writers. It was always creative and cathartic for me.

**Tobi:** Yeah, me too, yeah.

**Shira:** It was kind of the opposite of a dreaded task, it was more like this feels like cleaning out my brain. And so I for sure want to do that. So that mindset really helps.

**Tobi:** Right, yeah. Well, I'm a big journaler and have been for – I mean I always say 20 years, but if I did the math now it's probably longer than that.

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I'm going on 50. So it's probably 30 years or maybe 35, but in the same way, literally every day. I write so much. I have so much. All my processing comes pen to paper in a sense for years, not that you write this with a pen. But that whole process of forming ideas, or forming any kind of concept, even the design thinking I do is always that way so I can relate so much to what you're saying.

**Shira:** I also wanted to just say because I do have one friend who's a life coach who realized she didn't like writing, but she really wanted to have a book and had good reasons to want a book. She hired a ghost writer. And so that's another option and especially in the design field, which is so visual, if you love curating images but you're not wild about the idea of writing, you can certainly hire the help that you need and just keep the fun parts for you.

**Tobi:** Yeah, that's so good. Okay, this has been so fun and so informative. And I know people will love it so much because I think so often people hold this kind of information close to the kind of the chest, or the vest, or whatever the saying is because it feels like, well, I worked hard to get all of that. And I don't have to share it with everybody. It's kind of my info. So I really truly appreciate you being that open about the process. It's just from such a place of abundance, which I love so much.

Is there anything we didn't cover that in your final moments you want to share? And if not then just tell us where to get the book. I mean I don't even know if you can say the exact date in case it changes again. But tell us about getting the book when it comes out too.

**Shira:** So the book should be out all over the US and Canada November 2<sup>nd</sup>, and internationally in the UK, New Zealand, Australia, actually even a few weeks earlier.

**Tobi:** Oh, interesting.

**Shira:** And maybe translated in the new year. So most people should be able to get it wherever books are sold. You can get it from your local

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independent shop or Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Target, your favorite retailer.

**Tobi:** Awesome. And yeah, any final words, just like don't be afraid if you think there's a book in you, go after this process?

**Shira:** Yeah, 100%. I mean and I think just separating out the places where you feel like this is your zone of genius, where you really shine, these are the things that I really need help with. Even for me I'm terrible with commas and grammar but I didn't let that stop me from writing a 320 page book. I just asked people who were good with grammar to edit my book. And so I think not letting things like that get in your way if you really do have a burning desire, doing the things you love doing and not being afraid to ask for help for the things where you feel like it's a weaker place for you.

**Tobi:** Oh, so good. Okay, well, thank you so much. I learned so much, I loved this conversation and I've loved having you back and maybe we have you back again, maybe you're meant to be the all-time most featured guest on The Design You Podcast. You're going to become my cohost in the future.

**Shira:** I love it.

**Tobi:** No. We will definitely look for the next book, what, two years from now, three years from now?

**Shira:** Yeah, three years.

**Tobi:** Okay, perfect. We can't wait to see the one you have, I know it's going to be wonderful, I look forward to it and just thank you again, it was so fun.

**Shira:** Thank you.

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Thank you so much for listening to the *Design You* podcast, and if you are ready to dig deep and do the important work we talk about here on the

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podcast of transforming your mindset and creating a scalable online business model, there has never been a more important time than right now. So, join me and the incredible creative entrepreneurs in my *Design You* coaching program today. You can get all the details at [TobiFairley.com](http://TobiFairley.com).